DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 066 EA 025 566

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TITLE Education Reform: Federal Initiatives and National Mandates, 1963-1993. Occasional Paper 1993-3.
INSTITUTION George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Center for Social Policy Studies.
PUB DATE Nov 93
NOTE 70p.
AVAILABLE FROM Public Interest Publications, 3030 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 200, Arlington, VA 22201 ($6).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Government; *Federal Programs; Public Schools; *School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

The federal government initiated educational reform measures in the United States long before the subject became a matter of national concern. In recent decades, reform has focused on helping children whose special needs were neglected by the school system. Evidence shows that these efforts have improved services to neglected groups, but without increases in federal funding. Still, the role of the federal government in shaping elementary and secondary education is likely to grow during the 1990s. That role is more likely to be in systemic school reform through the design of curricula, model texts, tests, equipment, and the hiring of staff to free up teachers for instruction. Improving preschool education and the transition from school to work will also be emphasized. This report suggests that federal intervention is necessary if systemic education reform is to be successful. Included is a review of major federal initiatives from Head Start through high school. Other topics discussed are: Chapter 1, students with disabilities (special) education, bilingual education, and vocational education. Reforms outside the school system, improving the basic educational system through national standards and tests, teacher education, text and equipment improvement, staff increases, and school-to-work programs are also considered. A general overview of federal education policy concludes the document. (JPT)

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# Education Reform: Federal Initiatives and National Mandates, 1963-1993

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November 1993

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# EDUCATION REFORM: FEDERAL INITIATIVES AND NATIONAL MANDATES, 1963-1993

**Sar A. Levitan and Frank Gallo**

OCCASIONAL PAPER 1993-3
NOVEMBER 1993

Center for Social Policy Studies
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# EDUCATION REFORM: FEDERAL INITIATIVES AND NATIONAL MANDATES, 1963-1993


Preface ..... iii
Acknowledgements ..... v
Impediments to Educational Quality ..... 4
Major Federal Programs ..... 8
- Head Start ..... 9
- Chapter 1 ..... 20
- Students with Disabilities (Special) Education ..... 28
- Bilingual Education ..... 36
- Vocational Education ..... 42
- Changing Strategy ..... 48

Reforms outside the School System ..... 49
Improving the Basic Educational System ..... 51
- National Standards and Tests ..... 51
- Teacher Education, Texts, and Equipment ..... 53
- Hiring More Adjunct Staff ..... 54
- Facilitating the Transition from School to Work ..... 55

Federal Education Policy ..... 58



**Education Reform: Federal Initiatives and National Mandates, 1963-1993** was prepared under an ongoing grant from the Ford Foundation to the Center for Social Policy Studies of The George Washington University. In line with the Foundation's practice, responsibility for the contents of this study was left with the Center director.

# Preface

The federal government has initiated educational reform measures long before the subject gained prominence as a matter of national concern. In contrast to today's debate centering on issues involving systemic reform, federal policy has focused on helping children whose special needs were neglected by the school system. They included children living in poor and low income families, children with handicaps, children not proficient in English, and Indian children.

Evidence indicates that federal intervention has improved services to the neglected groups but only with relatively minor federal sharing in the added costs. Court orders and federal mandates prodded state and local education authorities to serve the disadvantaged and related groups. At the peak, in 1980, the federal share of total public education expenditures--K to 12--never exceeded nine percent and dropped during the succeeding 12 years to 5.6 percent.

The federal government played an important role as a catalyst in ensuring that neglected populations received an education. However the quality of the programs serving these groups leaves much to be desired. Head Start has well justified the outlays, but the effectiveness of the other programs are spotty, at best. Bowing to American tradition that schools should be run by local or state authorities, the federal government has tended to leave its financial contributions at the school door relying on the local authorities to carry out the federal mandates.

Too frequently the schools clung to established practices, offering only marginal help to the formerly

neglected students. In some instances the implementation of federal initiatives may have had a negative impact. In the case of Chapter 1, a program designed to help mostly poor children to succeed in their early schooling, a majority of schools receiving federal funds have pulled children from their regular classes for 30 minutes daily to participate in special instruction. As a result, according to the U.S. Department of Education disadvantaged children received minimal extra instruction.

Whatever the past impact of federal initiatives on improving the educational achievement of disadvantaged students, federal influence in shaping elementary and secondary public education is likely to grow during the balance of this century. Instead of focusing on categorical programs, the federal government can provide needed leadership by helping design curricular standards; funding the preparation of curricula, model texts, tests, equipment and the hiring of adjunct staff to free teachers to spend more time for instruction. Additional efforts should include improving the quality of preschool education for children from low-income families, and facilitating the transition from school to work.

Of course, implementing this agenda will require additional outlays. Given current federal budget constraints, however, Congress is not likely to supply the needed funds and the Clinton administration has requested only modest additional funds to carry out its ambitious educational reform initiatives. One way to advance the federal educational reform goals would be to shift some of the current outlays for categorical programs to implement the reform agenda.

The paper suggests that federal intervention is necessary if systemic reform of the public school system is to be accomplished. A review of the major federal education initiatives from Head Start through high school follows. The next section presents an agenda for improving the public school system and the role that the federal government can and should play in advancing systemic school reform, offering some speculation about

federal education policy during the balance of this century.

## Acknowledgements

*B*arry White (Office of Management and Budget) and Garth Mangum (University of Utah) offered detailed and insightful, but critical comments. Jay Noell and Bruce Vavrichek (U.S. Congressional Research Service), and Tom Corwin (U.S. Census Bureau) provided not only helpful comments, but also data sources that I hope I did not misinterpret. As usual, the authoritative and timely Congressional Research Service reports were a source of valuable information. My colleagues at the Center, Elizabeth Miller reviewed an early draft of the manuscript and Christine Spiritosanto shepherded the paper through several drafts and provided useful comments. Molly B.C. Ruzicka edited the paper, although the final version does not include all her meticulous suggestions. I am indebted to all of them for their valuable help.

Frank Gallo left the center before the paper was completed and should therefore not be held responsible for the final version, which contains observations and recommendations that may be in conflict with his views.

# EDUCATION REFORM: FEDERAL INITIATIVES AND NATIONAL MANDATES, 1963 - 1993

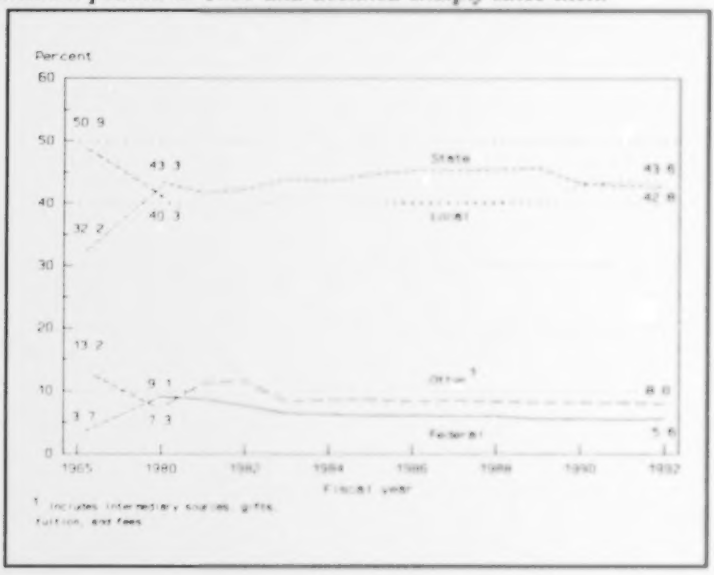
*A* decade ago a commission sponsored by the U.S. Education Department charged that the poor quality of public elementary and secondary education placed the nation "at risk." In the wake of persistent criticism of the educational quality offered by significant sectors of the public education system, the federal government is now poised to address the problem. Although controversy about federal intervention has persisted, the U.S. government has expanded during the past decade its involvement in elementary and secondary education. While schooling in America has remained largely the responsibility of local and state authorities, proposals for standardized national curricula and testing are currently being seriously considered by the Clinton administration, state governors, educational authorities, and other policy shapers.

The federal government has never supplied more than about a tenth of precollegiate educational costs. Outside of a few broader initiatives, most federal education programs have attempted to boost assistance to groups with special educational problems who were likely to receive insufficient help from the regular school system, including students from low-income families, people with handicaps, and immigrants.

Federal influence in shaping elementary and secondary education is likely to grow during the next decade, although the share of federal outlays in support of public schools is not likely to change during this century (figure 1). The strongest argument for a more active federal role is that local and state educational policy shapers have not taken adequate steps to implement remedial measures. Most telling is the fact the

states and localities have done little to collect basic information needed to assess school performance.

*Figure 1. The federal share of outlays for elementary and secondary education peaked in 1980 and declined sharply since then.*




Source: U.S. Congressional Research Service; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Second, there is ample evidence that the education and skills possessed by the citizenry critically influence the nation's basic societal and economic health. Since the 19th-century industrial revolution, no country has attained political or economic preeminence without a substantial investment in education for the masses. The connection between education and economic growth is not direct, but is clearly important and fully justifies federal interest and involvement.

Finally, certain major problems and challenges in education are best addressed by the federal government because they cut across state borders or emanate from outside the direct purview of schools. Rising poverty rates

among children and the increasing proportion of children raised by single parents have placed a growing burden on schools. Immigration, both legal and illegal, has soared in recent decades. Immigrants tend to be concentrated in relatively few states that do not control national immigration policy, and federal courts have required states to meet the challenges and costs of educating non-English-speaking children. These developments are national in scope, affecting all parts of the country to varying degrees. Some widely supported educational reforms, including national curricula and testing, are unlikely to be implemented in a meaningful way absent federal leadership. Much of the reform must be undertaken at the state and local levels. The federal government, however, can take the lead in some areas, and play a supporting role in facilitating state or local reforms in others.

## Impediments to Educational Quality

*F*ashioning an appropriate federal response to scholastic deficiencies necessitates a clear understanding of the factors that impede student achievement. The fact that the school system has provided an adequate education to the majority of students has fostered the erroneous perception that in the "good old days" virtually all Americans received a quality education. Schools are now called upon to serve all students and to prepare them for rapidly evolving technologies that did not exist a decade or two ago. It is therefore futile to search for solutions in a golden era that never existed. It is important to recognize the genuine accomplishments achieved during the past three decades, as manifested by improved high school graduation rates and expanded educational opportunities opened to minority students and those with handicaps, populations that were formerly often shoved aside. Further progress can be achieved to meet the challenges ahead.

It is impossible to rigidly separate problems that are inherently due to school factors from those due to outside factors, but the distinction remains useful in designing effective remedies. The poverty rate of children fell by nearly half in the decade after 1959, from 27 to 14 percent, but subsequently the rate of children living in poverty rose to 22 percent, and has not dropped below 20 percent since 1981. Children from low-income families tend to fare poorly in school, because their parents are often ill-educated and the concentration of poverty limits the revenues necessary to operate good schools, as local property taxes remain a major source of school funding.

The Michigan University's Panel Study of Income Dynamics tracked a sample of children who were 9 to 17 years old in 1968 to age 25. Only 71 percent of those who

had been poor for at least one year had finished high school and just 8 percent had a college degree, compared with 94 percent and 33 percent, respectively, of the children who had never been poor. Many children from low-income families do well in school, and there is no reason why many more could not also succeed with the proper support. Poverty is unquestionably less severe than in the pre-1960 period, and therefore cannot fully explain the poor quality of education that schools offer to significant proportions of students.

Due to separation, divorce, and out-of-wedlock births, a rising proportion of families are headed by single parents (usually women). The deterioration of the family structure has greatly exacerbated poverty because one breadwinner cannot generate as much income or provide the support that children need as two potentially can. In 1980 and 1992 poverty rates for single-mother and two-parent families was 5.6 times as high as for two-parent families; this ratio fluctuated little during the 12 years, demonstrating the powerful influence of family breakdown on overall child poverty rates:

| | 1980 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|
| Two-parent families | 7.7% | 8.4% |
| Single-mother families | 42.9 | 46.7 |

Many of the educational deficiencies faced by children of single-parent families are attributable to their impoverishment. Single parents burdened with the financial support of their children cannot devote the time and attention to their children's scholastic performance, behavior, and homework that a two-headed household can.[1] Family discord and conflicts that lead to separation or divorce, and the lengthy adjustment process afterward can cause severe emotional turmoil among children that impairs their schoolwork. Women who bear children out

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[1]U.S. Department of Education, *Reinventing Chapter 1: The Current Chapter 1 Program and New Direction* (February 1993), 20-22, 24.

of wedlock tend to be unskilled and deficiently educated, and are less likely than two-parent families to provide a home environment conducive to their children's scholastic success.

Lessened job discrimination against women and minorities--clearly a welcome development--may have reduced the quality of the teaching work force. Formerly, teaching was among the few professions open to women and minorities. Although evidence is controversial, it is widely believed that teaching attracted a caliber of talented female and minority workers that today enter better-paid professions.

The additive and interactive effects of various economic, social, and governmental changes have expanded the schools' responsibilities. Although schools have always performed a custodial function for students, the mass entrance of mothers into the paid work force has increased the educational system's role as a child-care provider. Because virtually all children attend school, it is a convenient institutional vehicle to serve the physical and mental health needs that formerly were addressed in the home. Sex education, for example is now a routine part of many school curricula, and some school systems have sponsored birth control clinics to minimize teenage pregnancies. Federal courts have placed the burden of ameliorating racial discrimination on school systems, rather than combating residential segregation directly. There are sound reasons for most of the newer responsibilities assumed by or foisted upon schools. Nevertheless, the increasingly heavy burdens placed on the schools have inevitably resulted in reduced attention to their primary educational responsibilities.

With the exception of court-ordered mandates, the most serious problems and pressures faced by the educational system are not attributable to the federal government. Yet, the national nature of these challenges argues for federal participation in responding to them.

Dominated by tradition, as are most established

institutions, the school system is characterized by resistance to innovation. The school year, with its lengthy summer vacation, reflects the needs of an agrarian economy. Although students attend school for more years, the basic subjects studied and methods of instruction have changed little in the past half century. A major goal of the current reform movement is to make the school system more responsive to social changes by adjusting its total operations, including curricula, to better serve its students and society at large. The federal government can serve as a catalyst and offer leadership to identify and help achieve necessary changes, although the actual transformation remains the responsibility of the teachers, administrators, parents, and the public.[2]

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[2]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Systemwide Educational Reform: Federal Leadership Could Facilitate District-Level Efforts*, HRD-93-97 (April 1993), 13-16.

## Major Federal Programs

The federal government now spends some $17 billion annually to support education from preschool through high school, up from $13.8 billion in 1980. Most of the programs enacted in the 1960s and 1970s have been dedicated to promoting equal educational opportunity, stimulating education reform, and promoting preparation for employment (table 1). A review of federal efforts provides insight not only into performance but also into the likely success of expanded endeavors. With the exception of bilingual education, this discussion focuses on major initiatives involving annual outlays in excess of a billion dollars.

Table 1. Federal funding for basic education continued to rise since 1980 reaching $17 billion in 1993.

(In millions of 1993 dollars)

| Program | 1980 | 1990 | 1993 | Percent change 1993/1980 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | $13,725 | $14,155 | $16,952 | 24 |
| Head Start | 921 | 1,631 | 2,776 | 301 |
| Chapter 1 | 5,573 | 5,980 | 6,826 | 22 |
| Handicapped | 1,885 | 2,298 | 2,844 | 51 |
| Bilingual | 297 | 177 | 196 | -34 |
| Vocational | 1,410 | 1,253 | 1,177 | -17 |
| Other | 3,637 | 3,016 | 3,133 | -14 |

Sources: U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *The Federal Role in Improving Elementary and Secondary Education* (May 1993), 3; and U.S. Congressional Research Service.

Head Start, Chapter 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, special education, and

vocational education account for the bulk of federal outlays for students below postsecondary school level. Bilingual education, although a much smaller program, is also discussed here because the federal government played an important role in the genesis of bilingual programs, and because of the continuing controversy surrounding the program.

## Head Start

Head Start is intended to give preschoolers living in poverty a scholastic jump on their more affluent peers, and hence minimize the failure they often experience in school. In 1965 only 16 percent of all 4-year-olds attended preschool. By 1993, Head Start's budget was adequate to enroll about halff of all poor 4-year-olds--the program's primary target population (most 5-year-olds are in school)--and a fifth of 3-year-olds. A quarter-century ago the program stood virtually alone, but over the past two decades academically oriented kindergartens, and other child-care providers have complemented Head Start in preparing students to be "ready" to enter school, although they tend to serve different clienteles.

In spring 1991, even including Head Start, 45 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds from families with annual incomes of $10,000 or less attended preschool or center-based child care (which almost always has an educational component), compared to 63 percent of the children from families with more than $30,000.[3] Head Start was one of the few antipoverty programs to secure major funding increases during the 1980s, and since 1990 appropriations have increased by 79 percent, to $2.8 billion for 1993 (figure 2). President Clinton proposed a 2.6 percent increase for the 1994 Head Start budget, which will probably not keep pace with inflation. In addition, President Clinton proposed to boost the 1993 summer

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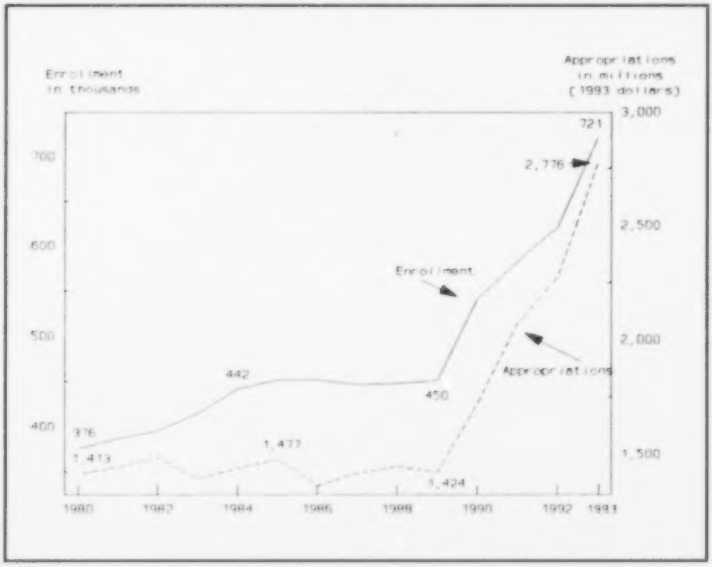
[3]Jerry West, Elvie Hausken, and Mary Collins, *Profile of Preschool Children's Child Care and Early Education Program Participation*, NCES 93-133 (February 1993), 20.

program by $425 million, but Congress rejected this proposal.

*Figure 2. Head Start enrollment was stable and appropriations barely kept pace with inflation during the 1980s. Both rose sharply during the 1990s.*




Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Children, Youth, and Family Administration.

The 1993 appropriation funded 721,000 slots. Eligibility requirements stipulate that nearly all enrollees be poor. Ninety percent of the children are 4- or 5-years-old, and most are minorities from single-parent homes. In 1992 their key characteristics included:

| | |
|---|---|
| White | 36% |
| 4 years old | 63 |
| Living with two parents | 41 |
| Receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children | 52 |
| Dominant language is not English | 21 |
| Disability | 13 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Enrolled for a second year | 19 |
| Left within three months | 7 |

There are 12,000 Head Start centers, slightly more than half housed in government facilities. A third of the centers are in schools, a fifth are in churches or synagogues, and the remainder are in community centers, public housing, miscellaneous government agencies, or other nonprofit facilities.

Despite low pay, Head Start has attracted a well-educated staff and a large corps of volunteers. More than four-fifths of the teachers possess a degree in early childhood education or a child development associate certificate (CDA, a credential Head Start created). More than a quarter of the aides are similarly credentialed. In 1990 the annual teacher turnover rate (14 percent) was 20 percent lower than for any other sponsor-operated child-care center except for the public schools. Head Start attracts nearly a million volunteers annually, and 81 percent of the classes have at least one volunteer daily for more than half the year. Nearly two-thirds of the volunteers are parents of students.

While Head Start has succeeded in attracting capable, dedicated staff, annual salaries have remained unquestionably low. In 1992 the average teacher's salary ($13,660) was under the poverty line for a four-person family, and the average aide's salary ($8,572) was under the poverty line for a family of three. In 1990 Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree earned 15 percent to 20 percent less than state or locally funded prekindergarten teachers, but their average hourly pay ($9.67) exceeded the amount paid by all other child-care centers except those sponsored by public schools ($14.40).[4] The low

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[4]Ellen E. Kisker, Sandra L. Hofferth, Deborah A. Phillips, and Elizabeth Farquhar, *A Profile of Child Care Settings: Early Education and Care in 1990*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, 1991), 7, 80.

Head Start annual salaries are due to part-time operations rather than to a low hourly pay. Expansion of the working day would raise staff salaries as well as provide more assistance to the working mothers of Head Start children.

Head Start presents several problems for potentially eligible children with working parents. Only 6 percent of centers provide care for nine hours per day, and virtually all shut down during the summer. A few centers secure funds from other sources, including fees for supplementary child care. But working poor parents who might prefer to enroll their children in Head Start may often need to seek alternative providers. Nearly a third of Head Start centers in the mid-1980s reported that they had initially enrolled children whose parents later withdrew them because of a need for full-time child care.[5]

Evaluations of Head Start show that the program produces clear benefits in the short term, some of which prove to be more enduring.[6] It is inherently difficult, if not impossible, to design reliable tests for 3- or 4-year-olds that can be used to adequately measure subsequent progress. Very few studies have tracked graduates of preschool programs beyond the late elementary school years, and longitudinal studies suffer from participant attrition that over time makes interpretations of the findings problematic.

With these caveats in mind, studies have found that preschool programs for low-income children (both Head Start and other programs) produce immediate, statistically significant IQ score gains of about eight points

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[5]John Love and Jane Grover, *Study of Head Start Recruitment and Enrollment* (Hampton, N.H.: RMC Research Corp., February 1987), vii.

[6]Ellen Galinsky and Dana Friedman, *Education before School: Investing in Quality Child Care* (New York: Scholastic, 1993), 72-79.

above children who did not attend preschool, but that the advantage usually fades within several years. IQ tests are of questionable value, but only one study has used *uniform achievement tests beyond the second grade. The* best-known and most positive study of preschool, the Perry project, did not evaluate a Head Start program, although its findings are, of course, relevant to the latter.

Preschool programs, including Head Start, have demonstrated more persistent gains in enhancing high school graduation rates and reducing the likelihood of grade retention or placement in special education.[7] The Perry project, which followed its young black participants until age 27, also found that compared to a control group the former preschoolers experienced higher earnings and employment rates, and were less likely to be arrested, receive welfare, or become pregnant as teenagers. Seventy-one percent of the former preschoolers completed at least 12 years of school, compared with 54 percent of the others. Although the achievement was relative, benefits to taxpayers exceeded the costs. The Perry preschoolers gained more than a grade level above other poor contemporaries, but their tested achievement and graduation rates were below those of the average student. The Perry program indicates the potential of preschool for poor children, but the project spent nearly 80 percent more per child than did Head Start.[8]

A more recent study utilized National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) data to track the impact of Head Start. In contrast to the Perry study that followed only 58 treatments and 65 controls, the NLS data offered a sample of over 900 Head Start enrollees and an

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[7]W. Steven Barnett, "Benefits of Compensatory Preschool Education," *Journal of Human Resources,* (Spring 1992): 279-312.

[8]Deborah Cohen, "Perry Preschool Graduates Show Dramatic New Social Gains at 27," *Education Week,* (April 21, 1993): 1.

opportunity for a quasi-experimental study using as controls siblings who did not enroll in Head Start. The study concluded that "participation in Head Start had a positive effect on a broad range of outcomes."[9] The gains differed by race and ethnic origin. For example, 30 percent of whites and Hispanics repeated a grade compared with 40 percent of black children. The investigators suggested that the observable information was inadequate to explain the reasons for the differentials in outcomes.[10]

Indications of long-term benefits are heartening, but judgments about Head Start have overemphasized this issue because it is unreasonable to expect that a year of preschool could outweigh all past or subsequent disadvantages experienced by Head Start enrollees. Most of the studies suggest that the gains resulting from Head Start last several years, which more than justifies an investment in preschool whether or not the gains persist beyond that period. Reports from kindergarten teachers demonstrate that Head Start is contributing to scholastic success. Two of every three kindergarten teachers believed that Head Start graduates were better prepared to do kindergarten-level schoolwork, to follow directions, to complete tasks, and to interact appropriately with both adults and other children than their low-income peers.[11]

A recent assessment found "serious deficiencies in the quality of services" provided by Head Start. Because few constraints govern the education component, the

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[9]Janet Currie and Duncan Thomas, "Does Head Start Make a Difference?" (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 4406, July 1993), 4.

[10]Ibid., 17, 39.

[11]Ruth Hubbell et al., *The Transition of Head Start Children into Public School, Volume 1* (Washington, D.C.: CSR, November 1987), 60.

assessment focused on more quantifiable services such as medical and dental screening and treatment. Head Start's performance standards require routine "recording and evaluation" of each child's educational development, but teachers had recorded observational assessments for only a third of the children.[12] Obtaining and maintaining adequate staff and facilities have consistently challenged Head Start, and the recent major expansion has exacerbated these difficulties, which no doubt also has affected educational quality. Even if appropriate educational performance standards existed, Head Start lacks the national and regional staff to monitor and enforce them. Congress rejected the Reagan administration proposal to fold Head Start into a block grant program, but sharp staff cutbacks accomplished the same goal. The staff reduction precluded meaningful oversight, a problem that continues today. Even Head Start operators have called for increased monitoring.[13]

The growing role of states and localities in preschool education has raised questions about the appropriate integration of Head Start with similar efforts. The National Education Goals (Ready to Learn, Goal #1) have reinforced interest in early childhood education. There is however, little coordination between Head Start and kindergarten, with blame attributable to both partners. Policy integration between the two is necessary in the interest of attaining systemic school reform advocated by the Clinton administration and articulated in the pending Goals 2000 legislation.[14]

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[12]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Inspector General, *Evaluating Head Start through Performance Indicators*, (February 1993), 7-8, B-7 (draft).

[13]Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow, *Head Start* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 197-99, 223-25.

[14]John Love et al., *Transitions to Kindergarten in American Schools* (Portsmouth, N.H.: RMC Research Corp., 1992), 27, 37, E-19; Jerry West, Elvie Hausken,

Since Head Start now serves roughly half of all poor 4-year-olds, enrolling all of them would necessitate doubling the current budget to a level of approximately $6 billion. The program's original goal was to provide one year of a "head start" to poor children. Serving all poor 3- to 5-year-olds would cost about $8 billion.[15] Raising salaries, expanding assistance to younger children, or increasing the number of days and the amount of daily time the centers are open would, of course, raise the cost considerably. Even if extra funds were accessible, some favor greater investment in parent education, rather than expending all available funds on Head Start. Nearly two-thirds of kindergarten teachers believe that the improvement of parent education is more important than securing increased funding for preschools.[16] The 1992 amendments included parental education as an integral component of Head Start.

The U.S. General Accounting Office found that the cost of full-day, full-year programs that met the accreditation standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children was $4,800 per child in 1988 ($5,850 in 1993 dollars) compared with $3,720 for Head Start.[17] The use of public schools or other government buildings would reduce this cost, but these

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and Kathryn Chandler, "Experiences in Child Care and Early Childhood Programs of First and Second Graders," NCES 92-005 (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, January 1992), 3.

[15]Anne Stewart, *Head Start: Funding, Eligibility, and Participation*, EPW 92-593 (U.S. Congressional Research Service, July 22, 1992), 13.

[16]Ernest Boyer, *Ready to Learn* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1991), 57, 157.

[17]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Early Childhood Education*, HDR-90-43BR (January 1990), 2.

facilities often require special equipment to accommodate the needs of preschool children.

Some poor preschool children are enrolled in different child-care centers, while other children are cared for by parents at home. State and local institutions enroll a larger proportion of preschool children. There is no need, therefore, for Head Start to serve all poor preschoolers. In 1991 public institutions enrolled 1.1 million in nursery schools and 3.5 million in kindergarten. Private institutions enrolled 1.8 million in nursery schools and 0.6 million in kindergarten. Two-fifths of kindergartners attended school more than four hours daily. The separation of Head Start programs from schools--only about one third of Head Start programs are now in schools--may not be in the best interest of children enrolled in community-based projects and other private organizations. Kindergarten teachers reported that they obtained records for less than half of former Head Start participants.[18] In 1991 about three-fifths of poor 3- to 5-year-olds in center-based facilities were in Head Start, with the remaining 275,000 poor children in other types of centers. An estimated 90,000 of those children were enrolled in preschools funded by the federal Chapter 1 program, and probably another 100,000 preschoolers with handicaps were assisted by the federal special education program.[19]

The substantial expansion of Head Start to cover virtually all poor children, although a laudable goal, would likely engender protests among ineligible families with inadequate income to afford nursery school. Twenty-seven percent of the state or local programs used family income as a criteria for preschool eligibility. Future expansions of Head Start might be accompanied by a sliding fee scale

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[18]Hubbell et al., *Transition of Head Start Children Into Public School*, 3, 13-14.

[19]Jerry West, U.S. Department of Education, telephone conversation with author, April 27, 1993.

that enables low-income families who are not poor to participate. To provide a completely subsidized education to children from families one dollar below the poverty threshold while denying assistance to those one dollar above it is arbitrary.

The education Head Start provides has become subject to a variety of pressures that did not exist when the program was launched. Precise information is lacking, but it is generally believed that the present kindergarten curricula resemble the first grade class of two decades ago. Demands for more academically oriented early childhood education have emanated less from schools than from parents who are increasingly aware that educational performance often determines later success in life. Nearly three-quarters of parents favor teaching reading and math in kindergarten.[20] With an increasingly larger share of children in child-care programs, the skills previously taught in kindergarten are now acquired at younger ages.

Consequently, the range of kindergartners' knowledge and skills, already disparate, has widened considerably in recent years. Schools have attempted to minimize this range through "school readiness," which reversed the prior practice of schools being ready for children. One of every five school districts uses screening or readiness tests to determine eligibility for kindergarten, sometimes including prerequisites concerning knowledge of the alphabet and numbers, to screen out children whose age otherwise permits them to enter kindergarten.[21]

Kindergarten entrance standards have put pressure on Head Start curricula. Whether Head Start should alter its child-centered, relaxed style in favor of an approach that emphasizes alphabetic and numerical skills remains

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[20]Love et al., *Transitions to Kindergarten*, 7.

[21]Ibid., D-5.

a subject of debate. It is likely that--for good or ill--Head Start will adapt to the schools, particularly because expansion of the program will probably result in more Head Start centers located in schools.

Head Start's future is entwined with the issue of child care. More than half of kindergartners' parents favor publicly funded preschools for 4-year-olds whose parents wish to enroll them. There is also much to be said for Head Start enrollment of children younger than age 3, but this would necessarily limit assistance to children in the immediate preschool years, who should remain the program's top priority. Other child-care programs should be used to target infants and toddlers. The importance of ensuring a stimulating environment to young children fully justifies a larger role for Head Start. Given limited Head Start funds, the focus should be not on center-based care but on parental support and education. Head Start parent and child centers already assist the 3 percent of enrollees who are younger than age 3. Under the Home Start component, instead of using centers, staff visit parents and children for 90 minutes four times monthly. Home Start also tends to serve younger children (nearly two-fifths of its 45,000 enrollees were 3 years old). The Home Start approach has proven effective, especially in securing greater involvement of parents in educating their children, and is less costly than center-based care.[22] To complement Head Start, Congress added in 1988 Even Start, a program dedicated to providing adult literacy, early childhood education, and parenting skills at an

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[22]Paulette Meleen, John Love and Marrit Nauta, *Study of the Home-Based Option in Head Start*, vol. 1 (Hampton, N.H.: RMC Research Corp., September 1988), 2:21-3, 4:26; Donald Peters et al., *An Analysis of the Effects of Three Modes of Head Start Delivery* (Newark, Del.: Delaware University College of Human Resources, 1987), 47.

annual cost of about $4,000 per family served.[23] At least initially, the program experienced difficulties in securing parent participation. In 1993 funding for the program amounted to $89 million.[24]

The federal government should collaborate with early childhood development experts and center staffs in setting standards that would help parents assess the quality of educational materials, equipment, and instruction offered to their children. Such standards are an integral component of the Clinton administration's proposed Goals 2000 legislation.

## Chapter 1

Head Start prepares poor children for schooling, but many nonpoor children also reach school age ill-equipped to succeed in their early education. Chapter 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the centerpiece of federal aid to schools, is designed to prevent children from falling further and further behind in school. ESEA's enactment in 1965 followed a lengthy debate questioning whether federal intervention in the public school system was appropriate.[25]

A compromise to alleviate state and local concerns over federal intrusion stipulated that Chapter 1 (initially Title 1 which may be revived by the Clinton administration) assistance would not lead to curricular intervention. The federal government has adhered to the

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[23]U.S. Department of Education, *Reinventing Chapter 1* (February 1993), 128-31.

[24]Wayne Clifton Riddle, "Even Start Family Literacy Programs" (U.S. Congressional Research Service, January 8, 1993).

[25]U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *The Federal Role in Improving Elementary and Secondary Education* (May 1993), 6-7.

promise that it would not exercise "any direction, supervision, or control. . .of any education institution, school, or school system." Consequently, the program has had minimal impact on school operations, at the same time hampering the effectiveness of Chapter 1. Chapter 1 could contribute to improving student achievement by better targeting assistance to deficiently educated low-income students, and by insisting that its funds be dedicated primarily to supplementing instruction in reading and mathematics rather than to replacing regular class time, as is often the case.

Chapter 1 accounts for less than 3 percent of total elementary and secondary education expenditures. Responding to political pressures, Congress tended to deviate from the original intent of concentrating the funds in poor locales. Although Chapter 1 targets areas where poverty is concentrated, the program serves educationally deficient children regardless of their family's income, the rationale being that although poor children are more likely to fall behind in school, other children also need assistance. The Clinton administration proposed to shift more funds to areas with high poverty concentration. Whether Congress will go along with this needed reform remains unclear.

In 1993, basic grants to local education agencies ($6.1 billion) accounted for 90 percent of the $6.8 billion appropriation. Other components of Chapter 1 included allocations for migrant children ($303 million) and for children with handicaps ($146 million). For fiscal 1994 President Clinton proposed $6.5 billion for the grant program, an increase of 5 percent above 1993, which is likely to exceed inflation by less than 2 percent. Complementing the federal program, more than half the states finance compensatory education for the disadvantaged.[26]

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[26]D. Verstegen, *School Finance at a Glance* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1988).

The federal government has instituted few rules concerning instruction, except to disallow schools to substitute Chapter 1 funds for routine state and local educational financing, and to require that assistance be concentrated on eligible children. Nearly 9 of every 10 Chapter 1 dollars are devoted to staff salaries. Neither the law nor the regulations specify the proportion of the funds to be spent on direct classroom services. A recent survey found that eight large school districts spent, on average, three-fourths of their funds on instruction.[27]

In 1990-91, 5.5 million students--one of every nine--participated in Chapter 1. Subsequent federal funding increases and retrenchments by states and localities may have shifted enrollment under Chapter 1 (figure 3). In the early elementary grades of public schools, where the program is concentrated, more than one-fifth of students were enrolled in Chapter 1.[28] The program, however, attracts little public attention because Chapter 1 instruction largely reflects normal school operations.

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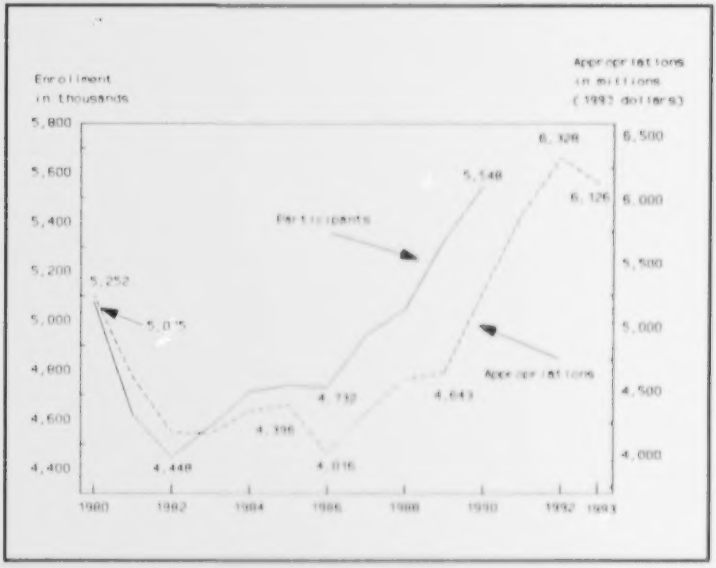
[27]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Compensatory Education*, HRD-92-136FS (September 1992), 2-3.

[28]Beth Sinclair and Babette Gutmann, *A Summary of State Chapter 1 Participation and Achievement Information* (Rockville, Md.: Westat, 1992), C-3; *Education Digest*, (1992): 51.

*Figure 3. One of every nine public school students is enrolled in Chapter 1 classes.*




Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Four out of five Chapter 1 participants are in preschool through sixth grade, and the distribution by grade has changed little since data first became available in the late 1970s. Because the funding allocation formula is based on income, states with a high proportion of poor students obtain relatively larger Chapter 1 grants: for example, in 1989-90 nearly 30 percent of public elementary school students in California, Mississippi, and Alabama were in Chapter 1. Some 14 percent of total enrollees possessed limited English proficiency, and 5 percent had handicaps.[29]

Virtually all school districts obtaining Chapter 1

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[29]Beth Sinclair and Babette Gutmann, *A Summary of State Chapter 1 Participation and Achievement Information* (Rockville, Md.: Westat, 1992), 3, 9, 40-41, C-1.

funds provide instruction in reading or writing, and two-thirds offer instruction in math. Estimated instructional time is roughly a half-hour daily for English/reading, and a little less for math. Classes are small, with an average of five Chapter 1 students per instructional period.[30] Since the children are often pulled out of their regular classes for Chapter 1 instruction, the net additional instructional time may be reduced to about 10 minutes per day.

Chapter 1 apparently fails to achieve its primary purpose of helping students doing poorly in school to catch up with their peers. A recent national test administered to third and fourth graders found that after a year in Chapter 1, students fell further behind their peers in reading and math. Even comparing Chapter 1 students with similar children not in the program demonstrated little difference in test scores.[31] Previous assessments of Chapter 1 have reached similarly disappointing conclusions.

In light of the program's use of highly credentialed teachers and small-group instruction, the notion that Chapter 1 may not be helping students is surprising as well as disturbing. Three out of five Chapter 1 teachers possess at least a master's degree, and school principals rate these teachers as superior to regular teachers. Chapter 1 also funds almost as many instructional aides as teachers (68,500 full-time-equivalent teachers and 61,200 aides).[32] One explanation for lackluster Chapter 1 performance may be the poor coordination of instruction with the students' basic scholastic program. A study of 15 schools with a high proportion (42 percent) of

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[30]Mary Ann Millsap et al., *The Chapter 1 Implementation Study: Interim Report* (U.S. Department of Education, 1992), 1: 4, 15.

[31]U.S. Department of Education, *Reinventing Chapter 1*, (February 1993), 77-78.

[32]Ibid., 73-74.

students eligible for Chapter 1 found that Chapter 1 teachers usually did not assign homework.[33]

Some states rely almost exclusively on certified teachers, while others primarily employ teacher aides. Student-to-teacher or student-to-aide ratios vary widely. Nationally there were 41 students per teacher or teacher aide in 1989-90, ranging from 20 in South Dakota to 82 in California. Consequently, Chapter 1 annual spending per student varied from $348 in California to $1,414 in the District of Columbia, with a national average of $753.[34]

To achieve performance accountability from participating schools, the federal government attempted in 1988 to install "program improvement" measurements requiring schools to compare annually the test scores of Chapter 1 students to those of other students. Initial results indicate little promise.[35] The schools that fell into the program improvement category took no action to improve performance, and the states could not or did not choose to intervene when a local Chapter 1 program failed to boost student performance.

The lack of attention schools devote to Chapter 1 students who fail to progress is a matter of concern. Most school districts have done nothing to comply with a 1988 amendment requiring appropriate, revised services for

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[33]Michael Knapp et al., *What Is Taught, and How, to the Children of Poverty* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, March 1991), 59-60, 63, 65.

[34]Sinclair and Gutmann, *A Summary of State Chapter 1 Participation and Achievement,* 23-25, 65.

[35]U.S. Department of Education, *National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program: Interim Report* (June 1992), 45-52, 61-62.

Chapter 1 students who show no progress after two years.[36] The school districts should have had such policies long before the federal rule existed, and their absence suggests that the needs of many failing students are neglected.

Until recently, the federal role focused on ensuring that localities were not substituting Chapter 1 for local funds. The schools' response to this rule was often to pull students out of their regular classes, a practice implemented largely to accommodate administrative convenience. Pullout or in-class services avoid a variety of the logistical difficulties confronting before- or afterschool instruction, including transportation services, staff scheduling, securing student attendance, and perhaps overtime pay when appropriate.[37]

A 1983 survey found that only 18 percent of administrators whose districts used pullouts believed the approach was educationally superior to other strategies.[38] The federal rules wisely avoided specifying instructional approaches, since this tactic would have no political support in any case.[39] Few schools have adopted the most obvious alternative of providing students extra help

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[36]Millsap et al., *Chapter 1 Implementation Study*, 2:34, 42-43.

[37]Mary Moore and Janie Funkhouser, *More Time to Learn: Extended Time Strategies for Chapter 1 Students* (U.S. Department of Education, January 1990), 5, 36-40.

[38]Marshall Smith, "Selecting Students and Services for Chapter 1," *Federal Aid to the Disadvantaged: What Future for Chapter 1?*, ed. Denis Doyle and Bruce Cooper (New York: Falmer Press, 1988), 130.

[39]Michael Knapp, Patrick Shields, and Brenda Turnbull, *Academic Challenge for the Children of Poverty: Summary Report* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning, 1992), 22-24.

before or after regular school hours. Yet, allotting extra time for learning is often essential if lagging students are to catch up with their peers. Chapter 1 funds should be primarily dedicated to this purpose.

Seeking to enhance the effectiveness of Chapter 1, a congressionally established review panel recommended the following major changes:[40]

- The program should seek to reform entire schools because the desired results cannot be achieved in 30 minutes of daily individual instruction or classes.
- Funds should be more highly targeted to schools located in concentrated poverty.
- Different tests should be used for the separate functions of assessment at the national, school, and individual student levels, rather than norm-referenced, multiple choice tests that impede effective teaching as well as learning.

A separate commission representing various educational groups endorsed many of the same recommendations.[41] Some necessary reforms, such as greater targeting of funds, have been repeatedly ignored by Congress in favor of spreading federal money thinly.

The review panel's recommendations were apparently aimed at using Chapter 1 to achieve federally guided educational reform, but the program provides too weak a foundation for this purpose. Improvement of Chapter 1 should be part of a systemic school reform,

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[40]"Statement of Independent Review Panel of the National Assessment of Chapter 1," February 1993: 4-5 (photocopy).

[41]Commission on Chapter 1, *Making Schools Work for Children in Poverty* (Washington, D.C.: Commission, December 10, 1992), 7-9.

while ensuring that the needs of lagging students in poor areas not be neglected. The adoption of stricter national standards would make it even more imperative that these students are not left behind. Learning to read in the early grades is a prerequisite to later academic success since low self-esteem often accompanying failure at this stage makes subsequent failure increasingly likely.[42] The top priority for Chapter 1 should be a targeted intensive federal effort to ensure that enrollees master the three Rs to minimize the necessity of remediation.

## Students with Disabilities (Special) Education[43]

Until the 1970s public schools tended to neglect the educational needs of children with disabilities, frequently excluding them completely. Reflecting these practices, the initial Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) failed to provide for children with disabilities, although the Senate committee report on the bill indicated that such children would be considered as "educationally deprived" and therefore eligible for assistance under the ESEA. The omission was corrected the following year when Congress added a separate title authorizing states to apply for project grants devoted to the education of children with disabilities.

The courts established the constitutional basis for requiring public schools to offer children with handicaps educational opportunities equal to those provided for regular students. In Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972), involving a class action, the court approved a consent decree that obligated the state to provide children with

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[42]Robert Slavin, Nancy Korweit, and Nancy Madden, *Effective Programs for Students at Risk* (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 1989).

[43]Christine M. Spiritosanto prepared a draft of this subsection.

retardation free public education. In a more sweeping decision, Mills vs. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972), the court held that all children with handicaps were entitled to free public education. Although the preceding decisions were issued by federal district courts, neither Pennsylvania nor the District of Columbia appealed the rulings, and other states dropped similar pending cases.

Buttressed by the court rulings, Congress mandated in 1975 that states be required to provide all children with handicaps "free appropriate public education." In contrast to the hands-off policy that characterized implementation of Chapter 1, the special education law provided for a more active federal role. The very title of the law, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, indicates that Congress expected the public schools not to exclude any children with disabilities. Congress not only made the legislation permanent but also included provisions that specified administrative rules avoided in passing Chapter 1.[44] The differences in approach may reflect the fact that the pressures for passing the law came from outside the educational establishment. Various organizations representing groups with disabilities apparently suspected that the schools might ignore vague provisions. For example, the act spells out rules for distribution of funds, requiring states to pass through 75 percent of special education funds to school districts and lists the groups that are eligible to participate in special education programs. But as Congress is frequently apt to do, the states and localities were left to bear most of the cost. The 1975 law authorized federal funds to cover 40 percent of the total excess portion of costs above expenditure for other students. Although the federal government continued to expand support for educating children with

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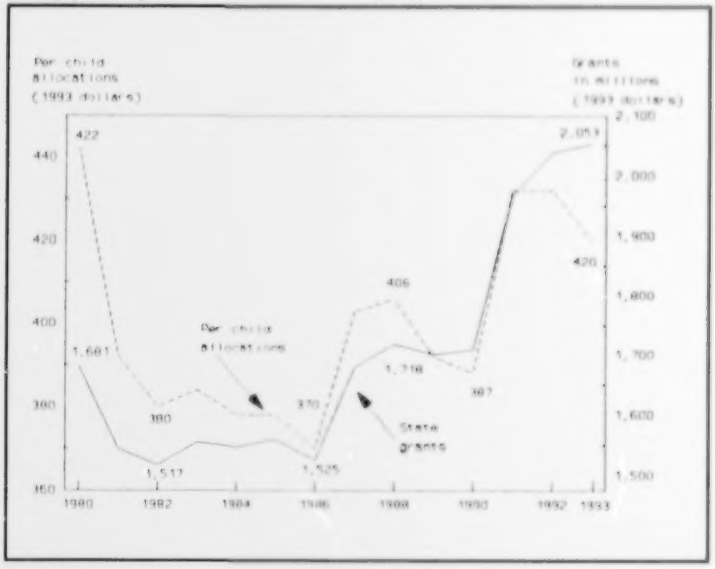
[44]Paul E. Peterson, background paper "Making the Grade," *Twentieth Century Fund Report on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1983), 122.

disabilities, actual appropriations have never exceeded 12.5 percent of the public schools' outlays (figure 4). In 1987-88 public schools spent an estimated $19 billion above normal expenditures to educate children with disabilities, averaging $4,313 per handicapped student. The federal share was 7.9 percent of this total, states contributed 55.3 percent, and localities 36.7 percent.[45]

*Figure 4. Federal grants to states for special education grew since 1980 but per capita allocations did not keep pace with total outlays because of rising participation.*




Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Direct grants to states are based on the number of children with handicaps who are participating in special education programs. Funds may be used only for "excess costs" associated with the education of these students. The

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[45]U.S. Department of Education, *Fourteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1992), 146.

major sources for the direct grants to states flow from several faucets. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which replaced the earlier law in 1990, provides for three earmarked grants to states. The fund allocation is based on the number of students with handicaps who are enrolled in each state. In addition, Chapter 1 of the ESEA funds a separate allocation for basically the same purpose (table 2). The Department of Education has proposed to allow states to merge Chapter 1 special education funds with IDEA funds.

Table 2. Even adjusting for inflation, direct federal funding for education of children with disabilities continued to rise during the 1980s.

(In millions of 1993 dollars)

| Program | 1980 | 1989 | 1993 | 1994[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | $1,691 | $2,380 | $2,718 | $2,803 |
| IDEA[b] | | | | |
| Basic grant (age 3-21) | 1,565 | 1,721 | 2,053 | 2,099 |
| Preschool (age 3-5) | 45 | 288 | 326 | 333 |
| Infants (age <3) | 0 | 198 | 213 | 249 |
| Chapter 1 | 81 | 173 | 110 | 122 |

Sources: U.S. Congressional Budget Office and U.S. Department of Education.
a. Clinton administration proposal; assumes 3 percent inflation.
b. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

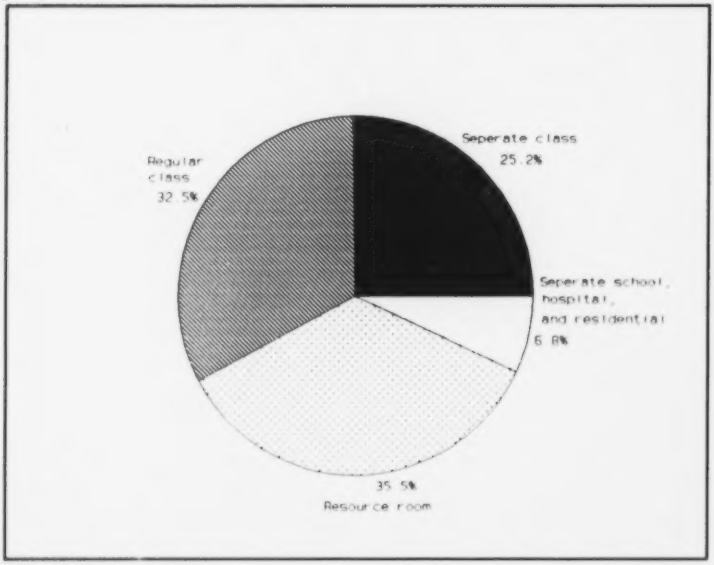
The 1993 IDEA appropriations included an additional $252 million earmarked for specific purposes and not distributed by formula. Recognizing the shortage of teachers and other professionals, Congress allocated more than a third of the funds to training and upgrading special education personnel. Additional funds were earmarked for designated activities, including projects for children with severe disabilities, those who are deaf-blind, and innovation and development.

Students with handicaps can be classified by the degree of their disability. The distribution of the 4.2 million children served in 1991 under the major grant program was as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Learning disabilities | 50.5% |
| Speech and language impairment | 23.4 |
| Mental retardation | 12.0 |
| Emotional disturbance | 8.5 |
| Multiple disabilities | 1.9 |
| Hearing, visual, and other impairments | 3.6 |

The degree of impairment largely determined the educational environment in which they were served (figure 5). Most of the first two groups are enrolled in resource programs where they spend less than 15 hours in special education classes for students with handicaps; and the rest of the time they mainstream in regular classes. Students with mental and emotional disabilities are usually enrolled in self-contained programs where they receive instruction of more than 15 hours either in regular schools or special day schools.

*Figure 5. More than 9 of every 10 students with disabilities were educated in regular school buildings, but two-thirds were served in different classrooms (1989-90).*




Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Providing education to students with handicaps involves high costs--2.3 times the amount expended on regular students--ranging from 1.9 times the average for children who receive less than 15 hours of special instruction to 10 times the average for children requiring residential facilities and hospitalization. Classes for children with handicaps are small, averaging 13 children per class, but only 4 children per class for children with serious handicaps.

Hard data on the impact of federal intervention in aid of children with disabilities are not available. It seems clear, however, that federal influence has been significant. For more than a quarter-century the federal government has mandated states, partly with carrots, to provide education for children with disabilities. Since the passage of the 1975 law, public schools have served an increasing

proportion of students with handicaps, rising from 8.3 percent of total enrollment in 1976-77 to 11.4 percent 13 years later.[46] The enrollment of handicapped children in the two major IDEA programs has continued to rise since the passage of the law:

| | Enrollment (thousands) |
|---|---|
| 1977 | 3,485 |
| 1982 | 3,990 |
| 1987 | 4,167 |
| 1992 | 4,717 |
| 1993 | 4,858 |

No doubt, federal intervention has accounted for part of the increase, but some unmotivated students and underachievers apparently have been classified as handicapped, thus shifting part of the costs of keeping them in school to federal special education grants.[47]

One can only speculate whether state and localities would have assumed their responsibilities to students with disabilities absent federal prodding. Demographic factors also may have contributed to the increases. Whatever the cause, there is evidence that services to children with disabilities have improved. A Stanford Research Institute study concluded that within four years after the 1975 law became effective the services had enriched.[48] A Gallup poll found that children with

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[46]U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, *Digest of Educational Statistics* (1991): 61.

[47]Scott B. Sigmon, ed., *Critical Voices on Special Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 41-42.

[48]Cited in Charlotte Jones Fraas, "PL 94-142," U.S. Congressional Research Service, February 10, 1986: 42.

handicaps received better education in 1989 than a decade earlier.[49]

The scarcity of hard data makes it difficult to assess whether the outlays on behalf of children with disabilities have paid off, and also offer cause for concern. A U.S. Department of Education report indicated that in 1985-86, the school dropout rate remained higher for children receiving special education than for other students, even when the data were adjusted for demographic factors (43 percent of students with handicaps compared with 32 percent for other children with similar demographic characteristics).[50] The fact that students with disabilities fair poorer in schools than other students should not be surprising. However, information comparing conditions prior to and after the federal government mandated special education does not exist.

More generally, a review published by the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities raises the question whether special education service has been effective. The analyst who prepared the study concluded that the results of the follow up studies "were largely disappointing: high drop-out rates, low employment rates, and social isolation were among the findings. . ."[51]

Support of educational programs for students with handicaps must therefore depend upon faith and compassion. Few question that most of the over 5 million

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[49]National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, *News Digest* (1991): 1.

[50]U.S. Department of Education, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 85.

[51]Margaret J. McLaughlin, "Including Special Education in the School Community," National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities *News Digest* (Nov. 2, 1993): 1.

children enrolled in special education programs need assistance to help them achieve productive lives. The education programs seem to offer the necessary help for some.

## Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is the most controversial of all federally supported school initiatives, largely because there is a striking gap between the public's perception of federal bilingual education and the actual program. In practice, federal bilingual education funding serves only a small proportion of all limited-English-proficient students, and the term itself is a misnomer because probably more than half of "bilingual" programs provide instruction in English only.

A quarter-century of experience has yielded little knowledge about what approaches to bilingual education work best or how well the varying current methods succeed, or even whether the programs are desirable. A recent survey found that eighth-grade students whose families spoke Spanish and who had attended bilingual education were no more likely to pass appropriate tests than those who had not. Moreover, the survey excluded from the sample more than half of the language-minority students originally contacted, because their limited comprehension made it impractical to administer tests in English.[52]

As is true of special education, the concept of limited English is inherently ambiguous; therefore, the number of children in need of assistance remains uncertain. The 1990 census found that the primary language at home of 6.3 million children aged 5 to 17 was not English. Some 2.4 million, 5 percent of all U.S.

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[52]Denise Bradby, *Language Characteristics and Academic Achievement: A Look at Asian and Hispanic Eighth Graders in NELS: 88*, NCES 92-479 (U.S. Department of Education, February 1992), 3, 76-77.

children aged 5 to 17, speak English less than "very well" by the standards of the adult in the household who responded to the census questionnaire.[53]

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act signified the federal government's concern that the prevalent "sink or swim" approach to placing foreign language students in regular classes caused too many to sink. A 1974 Supreme Court decision (Lau vs. Nichols) spurred increased federal support of bilingual education. Without specifying a particular remedy, the court ruled that a San Francisco school district's refusal to take special measures to meet the educational needs of its Chinese-speaking students violated their civil right to an adequate education. In response, the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act mandated that each school district take "appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs," extending the Lau decision to all schools, not just those receiving federal funds.

In the same year, amendments to the Bilingual Education Act removed the program's original restriction to low-income students, and stipulated that English as a second language (ESL) classes alone were insufficient because they did not meet students' needs in other academic subjects. Subsequently, 1978 amendments mandated that the federal program utilize bilingual instruction with the explicit purpose of facilitating ultimate English proficiency. By the late 1970s, bilingual education had acquired a negative image due to a widespread belief that the instruction stressed students' native languages at the expense of English. Amendments during the 1980s raised the permissible proportion of the federal bilingual education grant used for English-only programs from zero to 25 percent. The 1988 amendments

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[53]Steven Aleman, *Bilingual Education Act: Background and Reauthorization Issues*, EPW 93-119 (U.S. Congressional Research Service, January 25, 1993), 4; *Education Digest*, (1992): 23.

also stipulated that no student can participate in a federally funded bilingual education program for more than three years except if lack of English proficiency continues to impede learning, and no more than five years in any case. To date, political considerations--particularly the appeal for Hispanic votes--have played an important part in key legislative decisions on bilingual education. As of mid-1993, reauthorization of bilingual education was pending congressional deliberations.

The debate surrounding federal bilingual education has tended to ignore the realities of the program. In 1983 (the latest available data) receipt of federal bilingual education funds made surprisingly little difference in instructional methods, suggesting that local choices rather than federal mandates determined the teaching of limited-English-proficient students.[54] An unreleased study of bilingual education during 1991-92 indicated that English remains the dominant language of instruction in federally funded bilingual education programs.

Data on total government spending on limited-English-proficient students are not available, but the federal bilingual education program accounts for 15 percent of total enrollment funded by all three levels of government. The total 1993 federal appropriation under the Bilingual Education Act amounted to $196 million, a third less than in 1980, after adjusting for inflation. Grants to local education agencies accounted for 76 percent of the total. The balance was allocated to support services and training grants (figure 6). Estimates of limited-English-proficient students served by various programs indicate that state and local programs, and even other federal programs, assist far more students than does

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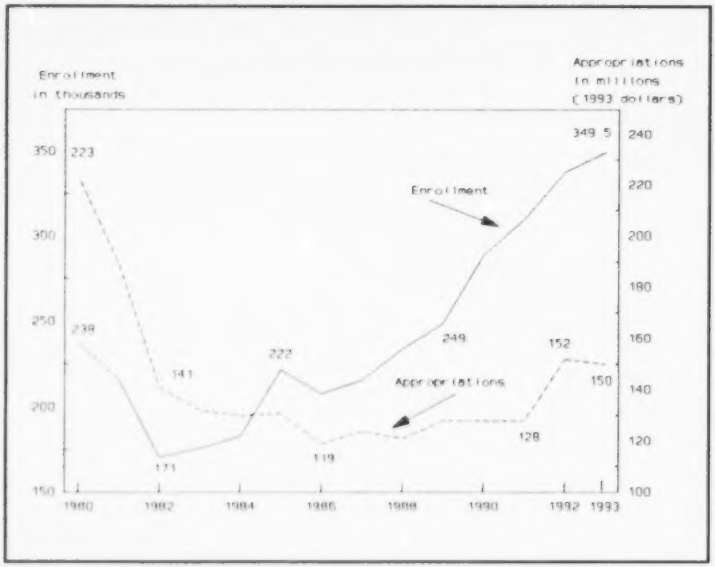
[54]Malcolm Young et al., *Characteristics and School Services* (Arlington, Va.: Development Associates, December 1984), 42, 191.

federal bilingual education.[55]

*Figure 6. Federal appropriations under the bilingual education act peaked in 1980 but enrollment continued to rise.*




Source: U.S. Department of Education.

| Program | Limited-English-proficient students, 1990-91 (thousands) |
|---|---|
| Special state and local programs | 1,584 |
| Chapter 1 | 1,153 |
| Federal bilingual education | 251 |
| Federal emergency immigrant education | 232 |
| Federal education for handicapped students | 144 |
| Other federal programs | 175 |

[55]U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Bilingual Education in the Nation* (June 1992), 20.

It is the responsibility of schools to educate all children, including students who lack English proficiency. The justification for a separate bilingual program, therefore, is not apparent. Whether the use of the student's native language is beneficial is still a matter of controversy, but the available research to date precludes any definitive conclusions about what instructional methods work best.[56]

Schools that receive federal bilingual education grants are statutorily required to evaluate their programs. One evaluation sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education found that the data collected by the schools are problematic, and that inadequate federal staff precluded utilization of the evaluations, even if the project reports were informative. In many cases the department was unaware whether the required reports had even been submitted.[57]

Use of the student's native tongue requires a sufficient number of limited-English-proficient students with the same language as well as qualified bilingual teachers. These preconditions often do not exist. Spanish speakers probably constitute more than two-thirds of limited-English-proficient students, but the remainder speak more than 200 different languages. Only half of the elementary school teachers of limited-English-proficient students in 1983 reported speaking a foreign language.[58] A 1990 study of California schools (attended by half of all

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[56]Michael Meyer and Stephen Fienberg eds., *Assessing Evaluation Studies: The Case of Bilingual Education Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1992).

[57]Paul Hopstock, Malcolm Young, and Annette Zehler, *Serving Different Masters: Title VII Evaluation Practice and Policy* (Arlington, Va.: Development Associates, 1993), iii-iv, 31.

[58]Young et al., *Characteristics and School Services*, 119.

limited-English-proficient students in the United States) replicated this finding.[59] One evaluation examined only programs in which teachers possessed bilingual education credentials, but concluded that the teachers had "exceptionally low" oral Spanish skills, raising questions about their ability to teach in Spanish.[60]

Given the doubtful efficacy of bilingual education, federal support remains subject to debate. The immediate issue is whether the federal government should fund a separate bilingual program. The burden on local schools to educate limited-English-proficient students is, of course, directly related to federal policy governing immigration, both legal and illegal. The resulting burden of additional educational expenses falls disproportionately on a few states and selected localities within these states. For example, a fourth of California students in the early elementary grades possess limited English proficiency. Redressing this burden is an appropriate federal responsibility that cannot be met with federal spending which averaged in 1993 $427 per pupil. An estimated minimum of half a million limited-English-proficient students do not receive any kind of special assistance.[61]

Currently, the largest share of federal bilingual education funds is distributed in response to grant applications ostensibly intended to help school districts initiate projects that would subsequently be continued with state and local financing after the three-year federal grant expires. However, it is not unusual for school districts to obtain overlapping or consecutive grants. This

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[59]Paul Berman et al., *Meeting the Challenge of Language Diversity*, vol. 1 (Berkeley, Calif.: BW Associates, February 1992), 10-11.

[60]J. David Ramirez et al., *Final Report: Longitudinal Study of Structured English Immersion Strategy* (San Mateo, Calif.: Aguirre International, February 1991), 182.

[61]Aleman, "Bilingual Education Act," 4, 15.

distribution system gives an advantage to grant-savvy districts.

The age at which most limited-English-proficient students enter the United States is unknown, but many are born here or arrive before kindergarten age. The use of child care or preschool programs therefore has great potential to minimize the problems of such children before they reach the mandatory school age. Some preschoolers who have limited proficiency in English enroll in Head Start programs, but the number is unknown.

If Congress determines to continue the program, it might consider dropping the current statutory emphasis on bilingual education, leaving the choice of approach to the states and school districts. Given the uncertainty about what instructional methods work best, the funding of carefully evaluated pilot projects should be encouraged. Insight and knowledge from such efforts might lead to designing models for distribution of bilingual funds based on demonstrable academic performance, rather than on vague, politically driven mandates emanating from Congress.

## Vocational Education

Federal aid to vocational education in secondary schools dates back to the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, but federal oversight has been virtually nonexistent. Vocational education generally involves courses that are either occupationally specific or more general. The objective is to introduce students to different career opportunities or useful skills that do not necessarily prepare them for employment. Computer literacy is one example. Contrary to popular misconception, there are no hard and fast divisions in high school among academic, general, and vocational tracks. In fact, virtually all high

school students enroll in at least one vocational course.[62]

Vocational programs may also include cooperative education, in which students receive academic credit for an ostensibly integrated course of study involving work at part-time jobs. The U.S. General Accounting Office estimated that 430,000 high school students were enrolled in cooperative education in 1989-90, accounting for 8 percent of junior and senior high school enrollment. In 1990 Congress omitted cooperative education as an allowable activity under federal vocational education law, but given the broad latitude schools possess, these programs presumably continue.

Federal oversight of the program has been negligible at best and frequently nonexistent. As a result, the most recent U.S. Education Department sponsored assessment of the Vocational education program, renamed in 1990 the Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, concluded that the act's impact on high school vocational education remains elusive.[63]

From 1963 until recently, federal vocational assistance had two major aims: to improve the quality of vocational education and to boost assistance to groups thought to have special needs by focusing on the economically and academically disadvantaged and handicapped.[64] In 1990 Congress dropped the specific

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[62]U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, *Vocational Education in the United States: 1969-1990* (U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1992), 9.

[63]U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *Combining School and Work: Options in High Schools and Two-Year Colleges*, vol. 2 (U.S. Department of Education, March 1991), 14-15, 20.

[64]Richard Apling and Paul Irwin, *Federal Vocational Education Legislation* EPW 88-704 (U.S. Congressional

requirements that a share of the funds be devoted to disadvantaged and handicapped students, in favor of more ambiguous rules.

The $1.2 billion 1993 federal appropriation accounted for less than a tenth of high school vocational expenditures. Adjusted for inflation, the 1993 appropriation for grants to states was 17 percent higher than that three years earlier, but 15 percent below the 1980 level. Of the 1993 total, $973 million was allocated for state secondary and postsecondary vocational education (figure 7). A total of $104 million was earmarked for the new "tech-prep" program (for four-year vocational studies that begin in high school and extend into postsecondary colleges). The U.S. Education Department does not collect information on the exact state distribution of federal vocational education funds, but a study based on 1986-87 expenditures estimated that high schools on average obtained roughly 60 percent of the basic state grant, ranging from zero to 92 percent across the states.[65]

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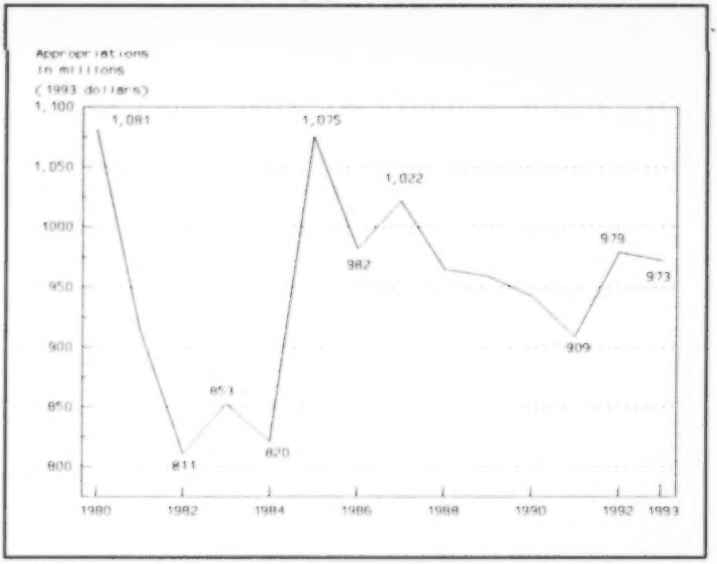
Research Service, November 1988), 8-13.

[65]Lana Muraskin, *Implementation of the Perkins Act* (U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Vocational Education, May 1989), 73-77, 81, 113-15, 123-24.

*Figure 7. Adjusted for inflation, federal appropriations for vocational education declined during the past decade.*




Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Because Congress placed relatively few restrictions on how the funds could be spent, federal funding generally blended with the schools' regular vocational operations. In 1986-87 nearly two-thirds of all school districts obtained Perkins Act funding. The median grant per district, probably subdivided to multiple schools, was $7,900. Three-quarters of the district grants were less than $25,000. Consequently, the 1990 amendments stipulated that the minimum local grants should be $15,000, $10,000 below the minimum recommended by the National Assessment of Vocational Education. Spreading Perkins Act funds thinly indicates that Congress has placed political considerations above the interests of operating an effective program.

The argument that high school vocational education offers inadequate salable skills to handicapped and disadvantaged students has merit. Students in schools

where poverty is concentrated have access to a narrower range of vocational courses and fewer specialized vocational high schools.[66] The Perkins Act may ameliorate this gap. The pre-1990 law contained critical loopholes that allowed the states to shift money to more affluent areas by requiring that at least 75 percent of the basic state grant be passed on to localities via a federal formula.[67] Nearly half the remaining state share was earmarked for single-parent programs, criminal offenders, and to promote nontraditional occupations for women. These changes were intended to enable high-poverty districts to obtain a larger share of Perkins funds. Ironically, the 1990 law's repeal of the set-asides for the disadvantaged and handicapped may have resulted in reduced services to these groups, and the 1990 amendments left the allocation formula to the states largely intact.

The 1990 federal formula used to distribute Perkins money to the states, as opposed to the formula governing state-to-local allocations, undermines the goal of delivering funds to the neediest states. Small states may obtain two to three times as much Perkins money per student than larger states, and there is little correlation between state Perkins grants and poverty rates among school-age children or overall educational spending per pupil at the state level.

Regulations aimed at improving vocational education have consistently been vague and backed with neither money nor enforcement. Consequently the 1990

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[66]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Vocational Education: Opportunity to Prepare for the Future*, HRD-89-55 (May 1989), 34-47.

[67]Lana Muraskin, "Return of the Debate: Can Federal Policy Improve Vocational Education for Special Populations?" in *Conference for the National Assessment of Vocational Education* (U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1992), 81.

law's emphasis on the integration of vocational and academic education is also likely to amount to no more than a rhetorical promulgation, especially since Congress left integration undefined. Under the best of circumstances, an integrated strategy is extremely difficult to implement in high schools, where the teaching staff is organized along departmental lines.

New federal vocational education performance standard requirements may result in closer scrutiny of these programs. The 1990 amendments required each state to implement performance standards by September 1992. Two years later the U.S. secretary of education was obliged to evaluate the quality of the state performance systems and determine the feasibility of national standards. These standards are designed to measure learning gains in basic and more advanced academic skills and to assess at least one outcome pertaining to vocational education, such as occupational competency, high school graduation, postsecondary school attendance, or obtaining employment related to vocational training. The standards are to include incentives that encourage services to disadvantaged or handicapped students. Schools that do not make "substantial progress" in meeting the state's performance standards would be obligated to implement a program improvement plan, although Congress denied states the authority to adopt sanctions.

A 1991 survey indicated that the most common in-school standards planned to use course completion rates, academic and occupational achievement, and attainment of a diploma or occupational certificate. The most common postschool standards involved employment rates and pursuit of further education.[68] Based on more than seven decades of experience, there is room for skepticism

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[68]E. Gareth Hoachlander and Mikala Rahn, *Performance Measures and Standards for Vocational Education* (Berkeley, Calif.: MPR Associates, March 1992), 12-13, 33, 45.

as to whether or not the intended reforms will ever be implemented.

Observers of federal vocational education policy have questioned whether the program benefits the students the Perkins Act seeks to help. A major criticism of the current vocational education system is that it tends to steer students from poor and low-income families into a track that precludes the opportunities available from postsecondary study. Another complication is the volatility of career interests among young people. Only half of the occupationally specific courses taken by 1982 high school graduates who did not pursue postsecondary education were related to employment three and one-half years after graduation (the latest available data). The federal government might, therefore, consider shifting funds earmarked for vocational education to existing work-based school programs that are currently in vogue, including strengthening and expanding cooperative education, school academies, occupational counseling, and demonstration projects.

## Changing Strategy

Given the lax monitoring of the federally supported education programs Congress might consider consolidating the separate appropriations into a block grant.[69] President Reagan favored such action but Congress rejected the proposal. The idea seems to be worth reconsideration. A debate on the subject might lead Congress to overhaul present policies and provide oversight of the $14 billion annual appropriations or leave it to state and local authorities to allocate the funds to serve students with special needs. In the process Congress could also earmark part of the funds for support of education reform discussed in the section of this paper devoted to an agenda for improving the educational system (pp. 51-57).

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[69]U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *The Federal Role in Improving Elementary and Secondary Education*, 54.

## Reforms outside the School System

*P*reventive measures are preferable to remedial initiatives, both in terms of reducing costs to the taxpayers and in alleviating the toll of human misery. When poverty is allowed to fester, the challenge of combating the pathologies associated with it become increasingly daunting. The task of ensuring a quality education for all has therefore become more difficult owing to a variety of challenges emanating outside the schools. Dominant among these are high and rising childhood poverty rates and the breakdown of the two-parent family structure. Children from poor or single-parent homes can benefit from special assistance, but the most effective approach would be to ameliorate these conditions in the first place. Programs that expand employment opportunities, raise earnings, reduce out-of-wedlock births, provide child support and child care, and secure minimally decent health care, and affordable housing are desirable in their own right. They are also critical for achieving educational improvement and more effective preparation for work.

The prime responsibility for supporting a family rests with the parents, but when they are unable to provide basic necessities for their children, government assistance is necessary. Work alone is insufficient, as millions of Americans remain impoverished despite working. Helping parents earn an adequate living is the first line of defense. The reintroduction of a public jobs program, abolished in 1981, would provide employment to individuals otherwise unable to find work. Boosts in earned income tax credit recently enacted by Congress, as well as raising the minimum wage, would encourage the

work ethic and improve family living standards.[70] Lack of health insurance is associated with poorer health, and poor health can impede a child's ability to learn. This challenge is already at the top of the Clinton administration's agenda.

[70]Sar Levitan, Frank Gallo, and Isaac Shapiro, *Working but Poor: America's Contradiction* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45-67.

# Improving the Basic Educational System

*P*ublic discontent voiced following the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education has not abated a decade later. President Clinton's proposals to overhaul elementary and secondary education and to establish institutional arrangements to assist noncollege-bound youth in their transition from school to work are the most recent efforts to achieve educational reform.

The federal government has mandated school initiatives, but except for preschool education, federal financing is inadequate to directly effect a major impact on the administration of public schools. By performance and by choice the federal government has attempted to work in close concert with the states and localities, to achieve mutually agreed-upon educational reform. In addition to countering discrimination and assisting the education of disadvantaged and handicapped students, the federal government can provide needed leadership to ensure that educational reform remains on the national agenda by helping design curricular standards; funding the preparation of curricula, model texts, equipment, tests, and adjunct staff to give teachers more time for basic instruction; improving the quality of preschool education for children from low-income families; and facilitating the transition from school to work. Outside the school system, federal intervention should focus on ameliorating problems associated with poverty and family breakdown that impede educational quality.

## National Standards and Tests

Since the ancient Greeks first began to debate the

question, there has been little agreement over the appropriate goals of education. The American educational system ostensibly has resolved the dilemma by allowing states and local school authorities to design their distinctive community educational objectives, although in practice localities also have avoided specifying clear goals.

Given this country's extremely high rates of geographic mobility, the argument for local educational autonomy may be less suitable than in other nations with centralized school systems. In 1991 one of every six 5- to 19-year-olds changed residences, frequently necessitating school transfers. Students who move to a different area may face difficulties adapting to new curricula. Even within a single school, teachers may address differently the same issues embodied in the textbooks. One study found that the same mathematic skills were often retaught in subsequent elementary school grades, with only slight increases in difficulty levels.[71]

Accumulating sufficient "seat time" until the legal school-leaving age is the de facto U.S. educational standard. Teachers and school administrators can and do promote functionally illiterate students to the next grade. This practice contributes to the functional illiteracy of adults. Employers reward higher educational attainments as a crude proxy for achievement, because school grades are misleading. The fact that employers tend to ignore grades, and that many postsecondary schools admit high school graduates regardless of achievement (some state schools are required by law to do so), actively discourages students' motivation to work hard in school.

A decade of public debate has resulted in only limited progress, and it remains unlikely that national achievement standards will materialize without sustained federal leadership. Agreement upon standards will prove

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[71]M. Frances Klein, *Curriculum Reform in the Elementary School* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989), 31.

difficult, but their adoption by other nations demonstrates that standards are feasible. The widespread usage of a few textbooks and standardized tests already constitute by default a semi-national curriculum. To improve the chances of ultimate acceptance and success, subject experts, teachers and their unions, school administrators, community leaders, and business representatives should fully participate in the development of curricula and testing standards. Proper tests are also necessary to implement standards. The U.S. General Accounting Office has concluded that non-multiple-choice national tests are both feasible and affordable.[72]

## Teacher Education, Texts, and Equipment

The launching by the Soviet Union of the first space vehicle (Sputnik) in 1957 led to federal efforts to influence the content of education. The U.S. government responded by passing the 1958 National Defense Education Act, the initial federal effort to improve the quality of high school academic instruction. Nearly three-quarters of the $240 million 1960 budget (in 1993 dollars) focused on science education, with the remainder devoted to foreign language and mathematics instruction.

By the 1970s funding had dwindled and the program was folded into a larger block grant. Concern over educational deficiencies prompted the federal government in 1984 to revive targeted assistance for mathematics and science instruction. The current Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Education Act, funded at $275 million in 1993, primarily supports short-term teacher-training programs. In 1992 the National Science Foundation (NSF) devoted $276 million to math and science instruction in elementary and high schools. Both the Eisenhower program and the NSF fund the

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[72]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Student Testing: Current Extent and Expenditures, with Cost Estimates for a National Examination*, PEMD-93-8 (January 1993), 22-23, 59-62.

development and dissemination of math and science curricula and materials, and teacher training during the summer. Most observers have concluded that these efforts have improved the quality of instructional materials.[73]

A handful of publishers dominate the textbook market in several subjects, and oligopolistic markets striving to avoid controversy tend to drive quality down and prices up. California has taken the lead in demanding better textbook quality, indicating the potential benefits from increased federal attention. Curricular improvements cannot transform bad teachers into good ones, but good teaching is not likely to occur without quality materials.

## Hiring More Adjunct Staff

Teachers spend up to a fifth of class time filling out forms, handing out or collecting materials from students, and performing various other noninstructional tasks. They also commonly spend another period of their working day on cafeteria, bathroom, bus, study hall, or recess duty because schools do not have sufficient support personnel. Extraneous teacher responsibilities detract from student learning time and limit opportunities for teachers to prepare lessons, review tests or papers, or sharpen instructional techniques.

By funding the hiring of unemployed individuals for teacher aide or other educational support positions, an ongoing federal public service employment program could significantly increase the amount of time teachers devote to instruction. In fact, the federal government successfully operated such a program during the 1970s under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). In late 1979, one of every four CETA employees worked

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[73]J. Myron Atkin and Ernest House, "The Federal Role in Curriculum Development, 1950-1980," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Sept./Oct. 1981: 5-36.

in schools.[74] Such a program could target low-income persons and welfare recipients looking for work and provide concentrated assistance to schools in poorer areas. Schools could also utilize the recently enacted national service programs.

## Facilitating the Transition from School to Work

Although the purpose of education should include the molding of a well-rounded individual who possesses the knowledge and discernment necessary for active citizenship, most Americans view education as the means of upward economic mobility. During the past half century, educational attainment in the United States has increasingly become the principal means of allocating economic rewards.

Other nations, for reasons of tradition, class structure, or meritocracy, have unapologetically directed children in the elementary grades into tracks that rigidly define their later occupational careers and economic prospects. Although tracking is common in American schools, the practice does not preclude continued education after completing high school. The schools have largely attempted to ignore the tension that exists between providing educational opportunity for all and sorting students by economic status, although the issue cannot be avoided. The fact that more than three-fifths of high school graduates pursue postsecondary schooling has helped to soft pedal the debate, but with college attendance rates peaking and earning differentials widening between college graduates and those with lesser credentials, the educational challenge of serving the noncollege bound has gained increasing attention.

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[74]Sar Levitan and Frank Gallo, *Spending to Save: Expanding Employment Opportunities* (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University Center for Social Policy Studies, February 1992), 20.

Responding to the needs of the "forgotten half" who do not pursue a college education, the Clinton administration has proposed the establishment of job-training opportunities for high school students and the funding of institutional arrangements to assist the transition from school to work. As a starter, President Clinton proposed $135 million for fiscal 1994 and $300 million in 1995 for planning and "implementing comprehensive statewide school to work systems." It appears, however, that Congress will approve only a fraction of the requested amount. The proposal envisions a blending of school-based learning and work-based components. The initial proposal is necessarily vague about the execution of the plan, but given the meager pending budget, the proposal promises more than can be realistically implemented unless states complement liberally the federal outlays. The emphasis on planning and evaluation of outcomes may, however, stimulate sustained school reform and improve performance by existing programs, including cooperative education, "prep tech," and other efforts designed to prepare students to enter the labor market. Cooperative education programs provide opportunities to earn while learning, which motivates learners who are not adequately responsive to classroom-based skill acquisitions. Prep tech prepares students for technical occupations in a school setting combining two years of high school with another two years sequence of post secondary schooling.

Skepticism regarding the value of job-specific training at the high school level should not be ignored, given the slim evidence that participants benefit in any significant way. Were added funds available--hardly likely under current conditions--the poor quality of the training could be improved, but the career uncertainties of teenagers would remain a strong impediment to specialization at a young age. The career interests of youths and young adults are exceedingly volatile, and occupational mobility rates in the United States are extremely high. The "practical" notion of training students for a trade is often shortsighted in the context of an individual's entire working life as well as the long-term

needs of society.

The career education movement that gained prominence in the 1970s sought to use the career relevance of academic subject matter as a motivation for learning. It stressed teaching basic communication and computation skills in the context of their application to work-related practices. The movement foundered but the search for better ways to prepare youth for the need to work and earn persists. There is a need for funding research, demonstration of successful experiments, and positive inducements to adopt proven techniques.[75]

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[75]Kenneth Hoyt, Rupart Evans, and Garth Mangum, *Career Education: What It Is and How To Do It* (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Company, 1972).

# Federal Education Policy

Prior to 1990 the major federal elementary and secondary educational initiatives were clearly intended to help children whose needs were neglected by the regular school system. These included poor and low-income children, immigrants, and those with handicaps. Except for the 1917 and 1963 vocational education acts and the post-Sputnik funding of science, mathematics, and language instruction, all the other major programs were enacted in the decade after 1965. The federal government has also promoted college attendance, through the post-World War II GI bill and the grant and loan programs enacted in the 1960s and 1970s.

Federal initiatives played a significant role in prodding the school system to serve neglected students. More recently, two successive presidential administrations, as well as state governors, educational authorities, and other policymakers, have advocated an expanded federal role as an active partner in designing educational policy, but not in running school curricula. Given budgetary constraints, federal outlays are likely to remain only a fraction of total public school educational budgets.

Until the late 1980s most policymakers were wary of "excessive" federal intervention. In fact, had proponents insisted on stricter monitoring of federal funding, Congress probably would not have enacted the major programs discussed earlier. However, poor test performance relative to other nations, declining earnings of labor force participants with less than postsecondary educational credentials, and sluggish productivity have undermined Americans' confidence in the quality of education offered by the schools, leading to the current clamor to improve school performance and increase support for federal collaboration with state and local

policy leaders in crafting educational reforms.

Given the widely accepted view that the public schools need reform, in 1990 President Bush and the state governors, with the active support of his successor, then Governor Clinton, announced six educational goals to be met by the year 2000. These goals called for ensuring that all children will be sufficiently prepared to start school "ready to learn"; a 90 percent high school graduation rate that would prepare students for responsible citizenship and productive employment; demonstration of competency in English, mathematics, science, and history by students at the fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade levels; first place for U.S. students in international science and mathematics achievement; universal adult literacy; and safe and drug-free schools. The goals helped stimulate the continuing debate over educational deficiencies. Time will tell whether the good intentions will reap tangible results.

In April 1993, the Clinton administration announced its educational reform legislation, called Goals 2000. It proposed the adoption of the 1990 education goals as part of federal law. President Clinton also favors the establishment of two new panels, a national education standards board and an improvement council, whose roles would be to certify performance standards and resource standards, and oversee the testing of national voluntary standards. Performance standards would cover major scholastic subjects, and the tests would attempt to measure progress at the national, state, school, and individual student levels. The resource--or opportunity-to-learn--standards would be designed to measure access to quality instruction or other factors necessary for students to meet the performance standards. The national education standards board would facilitate the assessment and certification of skills necessary for occupations covering large numbers of workers.

The improvement council would not be responsible for designing standards, but instead would certify benchmarks established by expert groups in

cooperation with educators, state and local government officials, and business, labor, and community representatives. The scholastic testing standards are scheduled to be completed in four years. Deadlines have not yet been issued for the other targets, although presumably they would be ready within four years in order to be integrated with the testing standards.

The Clinton administration also proposed the distribution of $393 million in fiscal year 1994 to states and communities that implement reform strategies related to the standards being developed at the national level. An effective way to achieve the desired results might be to fund states or localities that have already implemented or adopted reforms consistent with the Clinton administration's proposals. The experiences of these states and localities, if carefully studied, could prove valuable in charting the daunting course of national reform.

During the past two decades the federal impact on the public educational system has been far more pervasive than indicated by the limited federal funding of school operations. Ever since the passage of the 1963 vocational act, federal education policy has focused on the needs of disadvantaged students. When the executive and legislative branches have hesitated to exercise authority, the courts have stepped in by extending the power of the Constitution to compel states and local authorities to provide educational opportunities to neglected groups. The courts acted as catalysts in requiring the public school system to provide bilingual education and in significantly extending the rights of all students with handicaps to a "free appropriate public education."

Having established the legal rights of educationally deprived students to publicly supported education, the federal government is now embarked on expanding its role in reforming the total educational system. The federal government is not likely to provide in the foreseeable future significant incremental funds in support of public education--a reasonable assumption given the state of the federal exchequer. The Clinton administration

and Congress should therefore consider reallocating a portion of its current $14 billion K-12 educational outlays for advancing the agenda aimed at improving the basic education system outlined in the preceding section.

The federal influence will not be measured by the financial assistance it may provide, but rather by its success in motivating schools to meet the needs of a diversified school population in a society undergoing deep-rooted economic, technological, and social transformations. Only time will tell whether federal policymakers are equal to the challenge of maintaining a sustained interest in the task, and whether they can constructively contribute to developing a more equitable, efficient educational system without neglecting the needs of educationally and economically deprived students.

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